



Partnerships for Women's Health: From State Care to Family Care

The Challenge



In the early 1990s, most

women had little knowledge of or access to family planning. They continued to face the problem of having children they could not afford to raise, and

Anti-discrimination campaign supported by USAID in Romania in 2005 and 2006

turned infants over to state-run orphanages. While these children were one issue, another was the high rate of maternal mortality. Women were also dying from cervical cancer at a

higher rate than those in any other country in Europe. Thus the early detection and prevention of breast and cervical cancer had to become a priority.

During the communist

era, those with disabilities and those with HIV/AIDS had been hidden away in institutions, where they were often neglected. New systems of care had to be developed and new kinds of health professionals had to be trained.

The 2004 National Reproductive Health Survey revealed that the health of Roma was much worse than that of the rest of the population. Many Roma could not get medical care. Roma women rarely use contraception or prenatal care services.

The survey also revealed that more than a quarter of married women, aged 15 to 44, were being abused verbally, physically or sexually by their partner. Domestic violence is a pervasive problem in Romania that is rarely reported or discussed publicly.

The Response

Since the early 1990s, American advisors have been members of teams working on a wide range of topics, including patients' rights, integrated family health services, primary health care, controlling the costs of hospital care, the professional role of nurses, and ending informal payments to doctors. American-funded projects also promoted healthy behaviors and measures to reduce the spread of HIV, tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases.

In 2001, the Ministry of Health and USAID created the Romanian Family Health Initiative. It was an ambitious program to introduce an integrated primary health care strategy to increase access to and use of modern contraceptive methods. The program focused, initially, on rural areas where people have less access to medical assistance. Then, it was expanded to include poorer urban neighborhoods of large cities and rural Roma communities. Finally, family

planning counseling was introduced into hospital maternity wards. The initiative created and launched the first Romanian telenovela, which addressed typical health problems in a woman's life. Half a million women saw the innovative series: *The Real Women*. The Romanian Family Health Initiative also made the early detection and prevention of breast and cervical cancer a priority and developed a national program to address these problems.

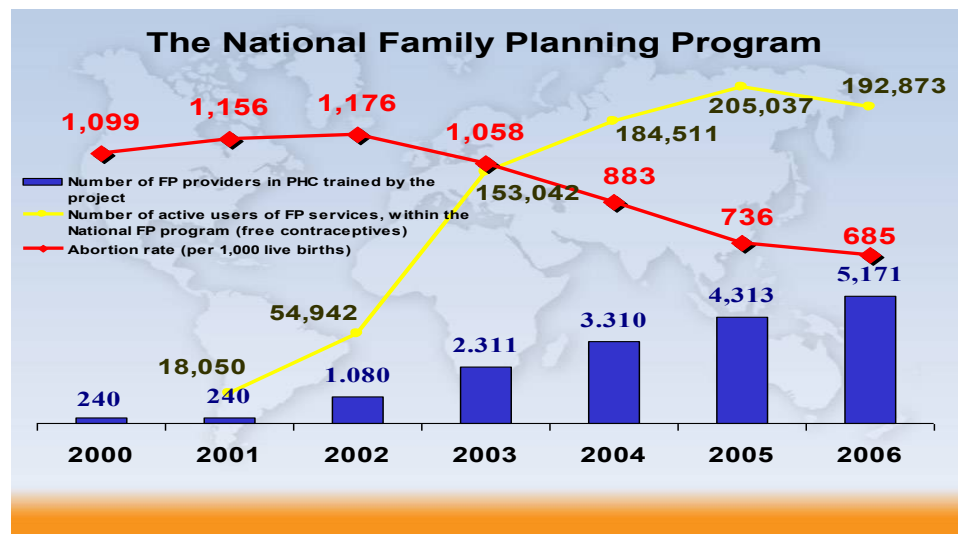
The Ministry of Public Health with American assistance developed a corps of Roma health mediators to introduce family care in Roma communities.



Rural family planning clinic in Bistrita county

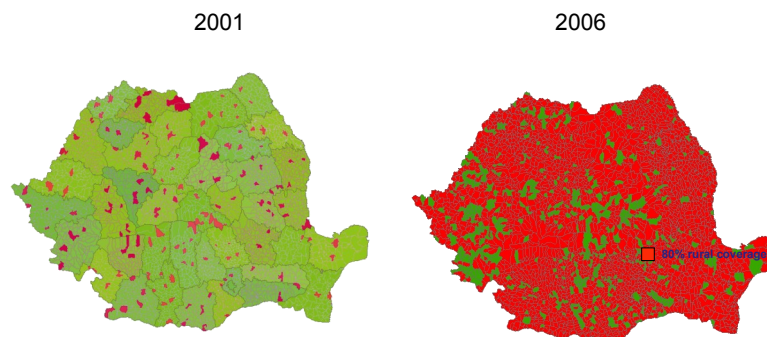
The Results

- Modern contraceptive prevalence rates among currently married women aged 15-49 has risen from 14% in 1993 to 38% in 2004.
- Unwanted pregnancies have dropped dramatically. The abortion rate has dropped from 3.2 per woman in 1993 to 0.8 per woman in 2004.
- Over 5,000 primary health care doctors and over 3,500 nurses offer integrated reproductive health services in 80% of rural communities, after being trained by the Romanian Family Health Initiative.
- Almost 200 Roma health mediators currently work in Roma communities with remarkable results.
- The TV mini-series *The Real Women* (about reproductive health issues) received two international awards for effectiveness and production quality.
- The National Reproductive Health Strategy and a national management information system for reproductive health services were created and continue to guide the development of improved reproductive health services.
- 70,000 working women, and up to 100,000 youth, and other adults learned about family health and HIV/AIDS.
- Five national campaigns to educate people about HIV/AIDS and reduce discrimination reached an estimated 8 million viewers.



- More than 2,000 priests and religion teachers work with their communities to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and family violence, as well as to reduce discrimination against those affected by these problems.
- 18 youth clubs now teach children about social problems and civic responsibility, and stimulate volunteer work.
- A national coalition of 30 NGOs continues to fight domestic violence.
- A new financial management system enables more efficient management of hospital costs, changing cost centers from number of beds to number of cases resolved.
- Legislation for private health insurance was drafted with U.S. expert assistance.
- Regulations to implement health sector legislation and a toolkit to help health officials to formulate national and local health policies were established to enable health sector reform.
- Romania has become a model for the region in family planning, providing lessons learned and expertise to Georgia, Ukraine, Russia and others.

Rural Communities with Family Planning Services



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